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PARREN J. MITCHELL

VANGUARD FOR JUSTICE AWARD AND SPECIAL ADVOCACY AWARD FOR 2010

From 1971 to 1987, Parren J. Mitchell, Maryland's first African American legislator and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, belonged to a chorus of civil rights activists lifting their voices against racism and social injustice. But when it came to promoting minority business development and economic justice for African American entrepreneurs, nobody sang lead like Congressman Mitchell.

Mitchell, who represented Maryland's 7th Congressional District for eight consecutive terms between 1971 and 1987, is widely acknowledged as the father of minority business development, a champion for small businesses and the leading voice for black economic empowerment in the U.S. This noble pioneer, who died May 28, 2007, at the age of 85, stepped up during a period when women and minorities faced high hurdles to business ownership and the good ole boy network had a firm grip on procurement awards.

Today, many of the thriving minority and women owned businesses in this country – including those being honored tonight – owe their benefits and protections to the legislative initiatives of a man who retired from Congress in 1986 with more than 3,000 awards and 14 honorary degrees. Our winner this evening is Robert F. Dashiell.

The winners of our 2010 Special Advocacy Awards, Christian S. Johansson and Lee A. Smith III, are two men whose advocacy on behalf of MBEs, at the local, state and national levels, has significantly contributed to the ability of MBEs to play on a more level field.

Robert Fulton Dashiell, Esq.

Pioneer of Maryland's MBE Movement

*...Sacrifices made
so that MBEs could get paid.*



When you first meet Bob Dashiell you immediately notice his quick wit, prolific oratory skills and commanding presence. He is a sharp dresser with a love of custom ties and premium cigars. What is not discernible to those who first meet him, is his leadership in a movement that changed the course of history for the state of Maryland. Dashiell is a living legend because of his role in creating Maryland's Minority Business program. He is an example of the sacrifice, commitment and dedication to a cause that began over thirty years ago.

Growing up in Salisbury Maryland, Dashiell was greatly influenced by the strong work ethic of his grandparents. It was during that time that he was initially bitten by the legal bug.

"As a kid, the television lawyer who caught my attention was Perry Mason. He always got people to tell the truth and he almost never lost", states Dashiell. "However, I didn't really think about going to law school until my junior year of college".

Dashiell first met Professor Parren J. Mitchell as an undergraduate student at "Morgan State College". They collaborated on *168 hours in the Lives of Black People*, a campus newspaper whose title symbolized the number of hours in a week (168). Dashiell also worked on Mitchell's campaign, assisting Mitchell to win his seat as Maryland's first African American congressman.

As an undergraduate, Dashiell caught the eyes of attorneys Ken Johnson and Larry Gibson. Johnson and Gibson created *Lawyers Committed to Civil Rights*, whose primary focus was to encourage young African Americans to go to law school. Dashiell was their first recruit and he was assigned to work at a prominent law firm. One of his assignments was to investigate a practice known as "block busting". He went door-to-door to gather data to investigate how Blacks were discriminated against in the housing market. Real estate sellers would use scare tactics to get white home owners to sell at a cheap price because of the threat of integration. Once sold, the houses were resold to black families for a price of as much as 10 to 20 times the original selling price. Dashiell was enraged by this injustice and thus began his days of activism. By the time of his senior year at Morgan, Dashiell received several offers from law schools from across the country but decided to go to Catholic University in Washington DC on a full scholarship.

After law school and a short stint as a government labor lawyer, Dashiell and two colleagues decided to start a law firm. The firm of Singleton, Dashiell and Robinson was the ambitious dream of three young black attorneys who wanted to own 'the largest Black law firm'. It was 1975, and no other Black law firms existed, the trio's objective was to do something that no one had ever done in a sustained way. Starting with just one client they grew exponentially. It was during this time that Dashiell met Robert Clay and Doug Sands. Through them,

Dashiell got involved with the Baltimore Contractors Association and found himself caught up in the tumult surrounding one of the largest construction procurements in the state's history – the Baltimore Subway. Minority contractors were incensed because of the lack of minority participation on the contract. The notion of a minority business participating on a major construction project, with millions of dollars at stake was unheard of.

Dashiell, Clay and Sands decided to create the Maryland Minority Contracting Association (MMCA) to mobilize their fellow contractors from across the state that faced similar battles for survival. When the Mass Transit Agency refused to meet with the group, battle lines were drawn. MMCA decided to stage a protest at the MTA headquarters in downtown Baltimore. MMCA members showed up in buses, trucks and cars, with men, women and children in strollers. The frenzy of the activity completely shut down the street. Suddenly someone emerged from the building and asked the MMCA representatives to come in and talk. These initial talks resulted in an offer of 2% minority participation. Undeterred, the MMCA did not stop working all channels and angles until an agreement of 10% was reached.

"It was indeed a hostile environment for minority contractors", said Dashiell, who was the attorney and spokesperson for the group and the movement. One of the most powerful and pivotal points of this era was the passage of House Bill 64 which created the Maryland Minority Business program. While testifying for the Bill he remembers, "in the middle of my testimony one of the legislators told me that I was making his stomach upset. I told him to take some Pepto-Bismol."

The Redwood Street demonstration was the first of many that helped shape public policy and change the culture of government contracting in the State of Maryland.

"The fights I remember most were the fights over how to implement the legislation", said Dashiell. "There was substantial disagreement about how to define an MBE and an MBE business and the absurdity of how to interpret the law".

Although this consumed most all of his time and life, the MBE movement was not paying Dashiell. He sacrifice was for the greater good – so that others could be paid.

Today Dashiell remains committed to leveling the playing field for minority businesses. He continues to be a successful attorney with long term clients. He believes that God is calling the shots and is very grateful for his family.

Christian S. Johansson

*His motto is...
don't own the problem, own the solution.*

The late statesman, Adlai Stevenson, once said, "Every age needs men who will redeem the time by living with a vision of things that are to be". Using that definition, Christian Johansson, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, will undoubtedly be one of those redeemers.

To say that Johansson is brilliant and accomplished would be stating the obvious. Would you expect anything less from a man whose mother just happens to have been the first African American Professor at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing (at the same time she was Dean of Nursing at a university in Sweden), and who also has invented and holds the patent for a tool that has the potential of revolutionizing rehabilitation medicine? And whose father holds a Ph.D. and an M.D.? And whose first cousin, best friend and frequent business partner, is no other than Frans Johansson, a modern day business guru, since his first book, *The Medici Effect*, made the New York Times bestseller list in 2004.

In the mid-1960's Johansson's mother, a North Carolina foreign-exchange student to Sweden, fell in love with a Swedish doctor and decided to marry him. "The anti-miscegenation laws had just been overturned in North Carolina, so my parents were married there, under the FBI's protection. They moved to Sweden where my siblings and I were born and we lived there until I was 13."

Johansson is a fourth generation MBE. His great-grandfather owned a dry cleaning store in North Carolina; his grand-father owned a sandwich shop; his mother sells her patented pain assessment tool so you could say entrepreneurship is in his blood.

Johansson started his first business while in fourth grade, selling subscriptions and gifts door-to-door. By the end of the first year he had earned more than \$4,000.00. This was the first of many successful business ventures that brought him to the attention of Baltimore's Economic Alliance Board, where with three months on the job, the CEO left, and, after a national search, Johansson became the Board's youngest CEO.

"All my life I knew I wanted to be in some sort of public service," said Johansson. "My role at the Board led to me working on Governor O'Malley's transition team and then on President Obama's team becoming the chief of the President's Urban and Metropolitan Policy Rapid Response Team. Two years ago when the Governor asked me to take the Secretary's job I was honored because I see Maryland as a state with limitless opportunities."

Once of Johansson's first successes in the job was to work with the Governor and Senator Mikulski to establish a National Cyber Security Center of Excellence in Bethesda. This brought several



new jobs and millions of dollars into Maryland, and most importantly established the state as the epicenter of this quickly growing technology.

To say that Johansson is inspirational is an understatement. Last month Johansson and Governor O'Malley were the personal guests of President Obama at the signing of federal legislation which implements the idea Johansson 'wrote on the back of a napkin'. This is legislation which will help every small entrepreneur in the country have greater access to capital.

"I started thinking one night," said Johansson, "about why it was so much more difficult for small businesses to get loans since the economic crisis began, and why banks actually have pulled the loans and lines of credit of many businesses that were approved well before the financial crisis began. I realized that many small businesses typically use their house or other real estate for collateral, and once the values of the real estate dropped, these businesses were no longer considered credit-worthy. In Maryland and, in many other states, there were existing loan guarantee programs, so I asked the Governor if Maryland could guarantee a loan for the difference between the value of a business owner's real estate prior to the crisis and its current value. The Governor liked the idea, and in addition to enacting legislation in Maryland to do this, he brought the idea to the National Governors Association and many states agreed to do the same. The Governor then brought the idea to the White House, and soon we were requested to help draft the legislation that would allow the federal government to fund states so they could expand their programs to even more businesses. The bill was passed by both houses within the same week and signed by the President the following week."

Johansson firmly believes that economic recovery will not happen until small businesses have the resources in place to drive the economy's growth. He looks at the current economic picture as a window of opportunity to accomplish policy changes to ensure small business success.

Johansson has not thought too much about what he wants to do after his stint as Secretary is up. One of his passions is to work with minority business enterprises to grow them to the size where they can become viable suppliers for Fortune 500 companies. Whatever he decides to do, there is no doubt that he will succeed and that his success will fuel the success of everyone he brings along for the ride.

Lee A. Smith, III, Esq.

*His respect for entrepreneurs
was instilled at a young age*

Lee Smith, Director of the District of Columbia's Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD), may have the Roman Numeral III after his name, but within his family he has accomplished many firsts. He is the first family member to move out of St. Louis, Missouri and also the family's first college graduate.

Smith is the oldest of four children born into a closely knit, devout AME family. His parents, who both worked outside the house, always encouraged him to have high aspiration and work hard to achieve them, lessons Smith adopted as his own philosophy which he frequently shares with his staff and the small DC businesses for which he is the principal advocate.

When it became time for Smith to choose a college, although his grades would have given him entrée to most Ivy League schools, Smith chose Howard University. In 1992, Smith left St. Louis intending to return once he finished school.

"I attended a mostly white high school," Smith said, "Although I did not encounter much prejudice I never quite felt as if I fit in. I couldn't relate to their culture, whether it was the music they enjoyed, or the clothing they were wearing. It was important for me to attend an HBCU so I could feel a cultural connection with other students and teachers."

After graduating from Howard and obtaining his law degree there, Smith realized that DC had become his home.

"I started getting involved in DC's legislative government and I realized that it would be easier to make a big dent in a smaller place like DC than to make a small dent in a city like St. Louis," Smith said.

Prior to his appointment at DSLBD, Smith served as the director of administration and government affairs for the Washington Convention Center Authority, where he provided overall direction and coordination of the Authority's human resources, contracting and procurement, and business services departments.

Mr. Smith previously served as chief of staff for the DC Sports and Entertainment Commission, directing senior staff, managing the daily operations of the Commission, and assisting the CEO in overseeing the completion of Washington Nationals Ballpark.

Mr. Smith also has occupied numerous positions within the Council of the District of Columbia. He served as a policy analyst for the Committee on Public



Works and the Environment. He was legislative director and counsel for the Office of Councilmember Carol Schwartz, where he developed and implemented Schwartz's legislative agenda and strategy and served as the councilmember's primary public liaison and spokesperson. During the final stint of his Council tenure, Mr. Smith served as clerk and senior counsel for the Committee on Workforce Development and Government Operations, where he directed committee staff and managed the Committee's oversight of 32 agency budgets totaling approximately \$455 million.

Smith believes that DC is a great place to establish a business. He notes that his city has the most aggressive laws to ensure small local businesses are participating in procurement opportunities. Businesses located outside of DC can take advantage of some of these opportunities under DLSBD's Joint Venture Program.

Smith is a student of business and entrepreneurship. The value of entrepreneurship was instilled in him at a young age by his, "hero" Uncle Tony who was Boeing's first MBE supplier. Another person who encouraged him in this area was the late great attorney, Johnny Cochran, who was Smith's fraternity brother and then became his mentor.

Smith was appointed to his position by Mayor Adrian Fenty. Since he took office, DLSBD has tripled in size and now has the capacity and programs in place to not only provide certification, but also many business development and training services to the small business community. During his two years in office, Smith has already created a legacy apparent to DC's small business community.

When not at work, Smith enjoys visits to the Smithsonian, roller skating, bicycling and riding on his motorcycle. However, his favorite activity is anything that challenges him.

"I like to be challenged, both at work and socially. I especially enjoy engaging in debates with people on the opposite side of an issue."

When asked if this debating is preparing him for a career as an elected politician, Smith said, "I never say never, but right now it is not on my radar screen."